

**PORTER SQUARE / LOWER MASS AVE
COMMUNITY DISCUSSION ON THE MBTA PORTER SQUARE AIR RIGHTS
JUNE 10, 2004**

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TO-DATE

In June 2003, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) issued a request for proposals (RFP) inviting developers to bid for a long-term lease of the air rights over the Porter Square commuter rail station. Two bids were received and opened in late July. The two respondents to the RFP were Lesley University and Oaktree Development.

The MBTA requested that Oaktree Development work with Lesley University and with the neighborhood to refine its development proposal, taking into account different parties' needs and concerns. Oaktree, Lesley, and the MBTA engaged in private discussions over the course of several months.

In March 2004, Lesley announced its decision not to enter into an agreement with Oaktree regarding a project on the air rights parcel. In April, Oaktree announced that the project was not feasible to pursue alone, citing the challenging site layout and associated costs, and withdrew its bid for the development rights on the parcel. The MBTA has not indicated when the project will be re-bid.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS TO-DATE

After the RFP was issued, residents and community groups met to discuss what actions the Porter Square community should take as well as how to share ideas and concerns with all of the parties involved. Two neighborhood citizens' groups, the Porter Square Neighbors Association (PSNA) and the Agassiz Neighborhood Council (ANC), have dedicated a number of their monthly meetings over the past year to discussion of the air rights. Some of these meetings have included presentations by the MBTA, Oaktree Development, Lesley University, and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville. In October 2003, the PSNA, the ANC, and State Representative Alice Wolf co-sponsored a large public meeting to discuss the air rights development. Representatives from the MBTA, the City of Cambridge, the City of Somerville, Lesley, and Oaktree were present to discuss relevant issues. In addition, the Cambridge Community Development Department has held two public meetings in February and April 2004 to discuss a range of issues relating to the future of Porter Square and Lower Massachusetts Avenue, including the air rights development. The air rights issue was also discussed at a meeting of the Cambridge City Council University Relations Committee in March 2004.

VISION FOR THE PORTER SQUARE AIR RIGHTS PARCEL

The following pages provide a list of some of the comments that have been consistently voiced by the Porter Square community through the public and neighborhood group meetings described above. This list should help to support a "community vision" for the future planning and development of the air rights.

**PORTER SQUARE / LOWER MASS AVE
COMMUNITY DISCUSSION ON THE MBTA PORTER SQUARE AIR RIGHTS
JUNE 10, 2004**

Urban Design

1. **Any future development of the air rights parcel should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the public realm for pedestrians and transit riders.** The area around the commuter rail platform is seen by many to be an uninviting area, especially for pedestrians traveling along Somerville Avenue.
2. **Development within the air rights should be of an appropriate scale and should not turn its back on the neighborhood.** New development should not create the feeling of a wall along Somerville Avenue.
3. **Future development of the air rights parcel should include an appropriate mix of development and open space.** The current nature of the space above the commuter rail station provides the benefits of open air and visibility for pedestrians walking around it as well as riders using the commuter rail station. A suggestion was made to create an “open atrium” style development, allowing for views to the sky through the center of large buildings.
4. **The Porter Square station itself, and the plaza adjacent to the station along Massachusetts Avenue, are in poor shape and should be renovated.** However, renovations to the station and plaza should not depend on the air rights project, nor should they rely solely on funds generated through the lease of the air rights.
5. **To the greatest possible extent, development on the air rights parcel should be planned as part of a comprehensive plan for the entire block, including the adjacent properties owned by Lesley University.** This is in order to more successfully mitigate the problems that might arise from the development, for example: to consolidate parking; to guide traffic through well-defined entrances and exits; to achieve the greatest level of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to all buildings; to maintain an appropriate scale of development throughout the block; and to ensure an adequate provision of open space.

Transportation

6. **Automobile use should be discouraged, and any project should be consistent with Transit Oriented Development (TOD) principles.**
7. **Care should be taken to ensure that additional traffic generated by development is kept away from neighborhood streets.** Vehicular entrances and exits should be planned accordingly.
8. **A pedestrian link should be created between Massachusetts Avenue and Somerville Avenue.**

**PORTER SQUARE / LOWER MASS AVE
COMMUNITY DISCUSSION ON THE MBTA PORTER SQUARE AIR RIGHTS
JUNE 10, 2004**

9. **The bike connection from Elm Street to Beacon Street in Somerville should be preserved and enhanced if possible.**

Safety

10. **Safety issues on the commuter rail platform should be a major concern.** Few passengers use the commuter rail platform, especially at night, and there is no MBTA attendant nearby. While the current layout of the commuter train platform at Porter Station allows for some visibility to and from the station platform, development would most likely result in the platform being covered. It should be ensured that the platform is well-lit and monitored, and that cell phones can be used without interference.
11. **Proper monitoring of the station entrance should be addressed along with renovations to the station and plaza.** People often loiter at night near the station entrance and in the adjacent plaza, where MBTA attendants cannot monitor people's activities. As previously mentioned, the maintenance and operation of the station and plaza should not be contingent on the development of the air rights.
12. **The safety and comfort of pedestrians and bicyclists on Somerville Avenue should be considered.** Somerville Avenue is currently an important transportation corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Maintenance

13. **The lack of maintenance in and around Porter Square station is a persistent problem, which needs to be addressed immediately.** Maintenance of the station and the air rights development are two issues that should remain separated.

Public Involvement

14. **Any future proposals for development on the air rights should recognize the efforts of residents and neighborhood groups that have taken place throughout the past year.** While this list attempts to summarize most of the main points that have been voiced, the MBTA and any future developer should acknowledge all of the discussion that has taken place during the long series of meetings that have occurred.
15. **In addition to the required development process in Somerville and Planning Board process in Cambridge, there should be ample additional opportunities for public comment regarding any development proposal for the air rights.** Construction impacts on neighbors should be mitigated as much as possible. The MBTA should consider establishing a liaison to the community.